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OECD/INES/NETWORK A

Review of Assessment Activities

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In this Issue

Hello to our friends and colleagues in the INES project! This January/February 2005 newsletter presents information on media coverage following the release of PISA (Program for International Student Assessment) 2003 and TIMSS (Trends in International Mathematics and Science Study) 2003 results. The article highlights the extent of media coverage in each country as well as the key topics focused on by the media, in both news reports and longer, feature articles. Additionally, the article discusses some challenges encountered during the release and coverage. Our request for information on this topic drew the largest-ever response from countries—and we greatly appreciate our correspondents for their time and energy in providing this wealth of information!

Also included in this issue is a country highlight focusing on the education system and assessments in Turkey. The article provides an overview of the different levels of education and information on national and international pupil assessments. As usual, the newsletter also provides updates on Networks A, B and C, and the PISA Governing Board, and a brief look at what is currently happening in national assessment and testing and examination programs in member countries.

We thank all those who contributed to the newsletter, especially Sevki Karaca, from the Ministry of National Education (MEB-EARGED), for contributing the article on Turkey's education system; Dan Andersson and Anna Jonsson of Sweden for updating us on Network B; and Jaap Scheerens and Maria Hendriks of the Netherlands for sharing information on Network C. We appreciate your efforts in keeping us informed of activities from around the INES Project. We hope you enjoy the latest newsletter!

Media Coverage of PISA 2003 and TIMSS 2003

In December 2004, the results of two international assessments conducted in 2003 were released: the Program for International Student Assessment (PISA) on December 7, followed by the Trends in International Mathematics and Science Study (TIMSS) on December 13. This article describes the materials prepared for the release and the extent of media coverage in each country, as well as some challenges encountered during the release and coverage. The article also highlights the results and topics to which the press drew attention, including opinions expressed by the media and other commentators in the form of editorials and features. This information is taken from newspaper articles, as well as summaries and updates from member countries. News articles identified in an online database and from a

compilation by our English correspondent included articles from the following countries: Australia, Canada, Ireland, Japan, New Zealand, the United Kingdom and the United States. In addition, 19 member countries provided summaries of the media coverage in their country: Australia, Austria, Belgium (French community), Canada, the Czech Republic, Iceland, Ireland, Japan, Korea, Luxembourg, Mexico, the Netherlands, New Zealand, the Slovak Republic, Spain, Sweden, Switzerland, the United Kingdom and the United States. Of these countries, all participated in PISA while nine also participated in TIMSS.

National Reports and Press Coverage

Reports and press releases

In preparation for the release of PISA 2003, almost every country published either a report or a synopsis highlighting national findings, to coincide with the international release of results, though the extent of the reports varied. Several countries (**Belgium-French community**, **Iceland**, **Ireland**, **New Zealand**, **Switzerland**, and **Spain**) produced short reports, summaries or brochures while others (such as **Luxembourg** and **Mexico**) produced longer reports. Four countries (**Ireland**, **Japan**, **New Zealand** and **Switzerland**) are working on longer or supplementary reports that will be subsequently published in the spring and summer of 2005. In addition, the national reports for **Canada** and **Mexico** also included results for provinces and states. Several countries also prepared supplemental handouts for the media such as highlights or executive summaries of the results or frequently asked questions and their answers. Finally, every country also issued press statements or all but one (United Kingdom) conducted a press conference.

The **United Kingdom**'s preparation for the release differed slightly from other countries because of the unique treatment of its data in the PISA 2003 international report due to low response rates in England (although both Scotland and Northern Ireland samples met the response criteria), and the lack of comparability of 2003 data to other countries and to 2000 data in the United Kingdom. The Department for Education and Skills (DfES) issued a brief press statement in mid-November, announcing how data for England and the United Kingdom would be treated and that there would not be a full national report nor a press conference. This decision drew great attention from the media, some of whom speculated that there were other reasons for the non-release, such as trying to suppress results that suggested lower performance in 2003 or overstated results in 2000. A second press notice was issued on December 7 providing summary results and an explanation of the OECD's decision regarding the response rates. Scotland and Northern Ireland produced their own press notices and reports of students' results.

For most countries that also participated in TIMSS 2003, preparations were much the same as for the PISA 2003 release: national reports or summaries, press briefings and press conferences, though there were some exceptions. In **Japan**, a summary was prepared instead of a national report, and in the **Slovak Republic**, no report was prepared though there was a press release issued about the results. In **Canada** only two of ten provinces participated in TIMSS 2003, and thus two provincial reports took the place of a national report. Similarly, in the **United**

Kingdom, only England and Scotland took part in TIMSS 2003; the country prepared a national report and a press notice but did not hold a press conference.

Extent of media coverage

In all the respondent countries, the results of both PISA 2003 and TIMSS 2003 were reported in major newspapers immediately following the release and usually received coverage on television and radio as well.

A number of countries, including **Australia**, **Canada**, the **Czech Republic**, **Japan**, **Luxembourg**, **Mexico**, **Spain**, **Sweden**, **Switzerland** and the **United States**, reported substantial press coverage, with results reported in multiple types of media. Seven countries (**Australia**, **Canada**, the **Czech Republic**, **Iceland**, **Japan**, **Mexico** and the **Slovak Republic**) reported that PISA 2003 results made front-page news in at least one, if not more, major newspapers.

As mentioned before, the **United Kingdom**'s unique situation also drew a considerable amount of attention from the media. The November announcement attracted some early interest, while the release of the results in December made the front page of one of the country's largest newspapers and received substantial coverage on the inside pages of other newspapers. While total media coverage was substantial, our correspondent noted that it was mainly the more conservative broadsheet newspapers that reported the results while other mass-market and more moderate papers generally did not carry the story at all.

Beyond initial reporting of the results, newspapers often followed up with additional articles. There were several follow-up pieces in **Australian** papers that focused specifically on PISA or TIMSS, and the results of both assessments were often quoted and referred to in various articles on education-related issues. In **Mexico**, newspapers published follow-up articles on PISA throughout December and January, dovetailing with the release of national assessment results near the same time; and there also were some in-depth analysis and reflection articles in **Spain** in the two weeks following the release and even

Box 1: Tracking Coverage of PISA 2003

A few countries tracked the number of newspaper articles and TV or radio spots that PISA 2003 garnered in the immediate aftermath of the release, or the number of papers and stations that carried stories, and shared this information with us.

- Belgium (French Community): 26 articles in daily, weekly and monthly papers
- Canada: Articles and spots in 50 newspapers and 10 TV and radio stations
- Czech Republic: 14 articles, 5 TV spots and 8 radio spots
- Ireland: 1 TV interview, 1 requested radio interview and newspaper coverage
- Luxembourg: articles in 7 newspapers, 1 TV station and 5 radio stations
- New Zealand: 7 articles, 1 TV spot and 2 radio spots
- Slovak Republic: 4 front-page articles, 7 issues articles and 3 TV and radio spots
- Switzerland: At least 25 articles in Swiss papers

occasionally in January. **Switzerland**'s conference in January on the PISA 2003 results garnered substantial coverage in Bern's main newspaper, including a full-page interview with the organizer before the conference and a report of the outcomes after the conference.

Just as newspapers featured follow-up stories, television and radio also devoted subsequent attention to PISA 2003. In **Belgium (French community)**, there was a nationally televised special discussion on the results a few days after the initial release. Radio and television in **Canada** and the **Slovak Republic** broadcasted interviews given by Ministers of Education as well as other key personnel associated with PISA 2003. **Swiss** television programs also mentioned PISA 2003 repeatedly in several programs that centered on other education topics, leading our Swiss correspondent to comment that "you cannot publicly speak about education in Switzerland without mentioning PISA!"

Though many countries described substantial media interest in the PISA 2003 and TIMSS 2003 results, a few others mentioned that coverage was somewhat limited. In **Iceland**, though results were covered in all major media with some follow-up pieces, interest in incorrect results that had leaked out before the release date was higher than in the actual results, and overall, attention was less than in 2000, perhaps because of the generally strong performance of Iceland students in 2003. **Ireland** also expressed disappointment that the country's major newspaper did not feature the results on the front page but noted that there was a fairly long article and an editorial on inside pages. Despite considerable initial coverage in **Sweden**, interest in PISA and TIMSS quickly faded when the tragedy of the tsunami in East Asia filled the news. In the **United Kingdom**, though the results drew substantial attention in England, coverage in Scottish newspapers was limited, and the news went completely unreported in Northern Ireland, perhaps because of domestic political events occurring at the same time. The **Netherlands** and **New Zealand** reported that, while initial coverage was strong, there has been little or no follow up.

Moreover, while most countries that participated in both PISA 2003 and TIMSS 2003 reported similar amounts of coverage for both assessments, a few noted specifically that TIMSS results garnered much less attention than PISA results. The TIMSS 2003 release in **Canada** received virtually no media coverage because of its proximity to the release of PISA 2003 results. In the **Netherlands**, only two newspapers reported the release of TIMSS 2003 results while almost all national newspapers carried the results of PISA 2003. There was also less coverage surrounding TIMSS than PISA in the **United Kingdom**—perhaps because of the comparatively uncontroversial release—and the TIMSS 2003 results tended to be included as part of stories on other attainments that coincidentally appeared at the same time.

Challenges with the release and coverage

While media coverage and release went smoothly overall, several European countries reported problems with results leaking out before the release date. In **Austria**, news sources learned of PISA rankings from a foreign press agency and circulated parts of the results by the end of November. Additional information continued to leak out, and Austrian rankings were announced on television

and in most major daily newspapers by December 2, five days prior to the official release. **Iceland** and **Luxembourg** reported somewhat similar experiences: their press obtained the results early from foreign media, still respected the embargo, but lost some interest by the actual release date. Additionally, the leaks created confusion and misreporting of both the Icelandic and **Swedish** results. Though the error was eventually corrected in Iceland, the mistake may have diverted attention away from the actual results. **Switzerland** noted that because of foreign leaks, about 15 of its newspapers had already published the complete rankings before the official Swiss press briefing.

New Zealand's challenge with the press stemmed from the media's coverage rather than the release. The Ministry of Education sought to emphasize to the press that the rankings were of limited usefulness and attempted to educate them about the meaning of significant differences among countries' mean achievement scores. In spite of these efforts, most papers still highlighted New Zealand's lower rankings in PISA 2003 as compared to 2000. Similarly, Sweden's National Agency for Education had sought to convey three main messages from PISA 2003—one of which was declining equity among Swedish students—though these were lost because of the interest surrounding the leaked results that had been reported incorrectly.

Focus of Media Coverage

Countries reported media interest in a variety of results from PISA 2003. Although the international comparisons of student performance—generally cited as rankings in the media—were of primary and nearly universal interest, trends in student performance, equity issues and school structures and practices received some attention as well. While media coverage is in part driven by what the results actually are (i.e., is there a story to tell?), it is interesting and informative to learn which results received attention in the press.

Average student performance in PISA 2003

The media's coverage of PISA 2003 in the majority of countries (**Australia**, **Belgium**, the **Czech Republic**, **Iceland**, **Ireland**, **Luxembourg**, **Mexico**, the **Netherlands**, the **Slovak Republic**, **Spain**, **Scotland**, **Sweden**, **Switzerland** and the **United States**) focused primarily on average student performance and how students compared internationally. The **Australian** media, for instance, highlighted the high rankings of their students in all assessment disciplines, with news articles announcing that "Australian school students are among the best in the world . . ."[1] Media in **Iceland**, the **Netherlands** and **Scotland** drew attention to their students' relatively strong performance as well, while at least one **Irish** paper also focused on the relatively strong performance of Irish students in science and reading, with headlines such as: "We're close to the top of the class in worldwide literacy league."[2] However, media interests in Ireland varied, and a more critical paper instead chose to emphasize the average performance in math, highlighting how the same body of results can draw different emphases and overall interpretations.

[1] Buckingham, J. (2004, December 8). Aussies score top marks in world test. *The Australian*. Retrieved from www.theaustralian.news.com.au

[2] Donnelly, K. (2004, December 7). We're close to top of the class in worldwide literacy league. *Irish Independent.*

The press in **Mexico**, **Slovak Republic**, **Spain**, **Sweden** and the **United States** spotlighted the average or poor results of their students. The headline on the front page of a major paper in the **United States** ran: "In a Global Test of Math Skills, U.S. Students Behind the Curve."[3] Both **Australian** and **Canadian** papers highlighted not only international comparisons but also the contrasting results among their own provinces and territories, which are important sub-national comparisons.

Trends in student performance in PISA

In addition to average student performance and the international comparisons, the media in several countries also highlighted changes in student performance as compared to the 2000 results. A key topic in **Austrian** newspapers, for example, was the drop in relative performance in reading and decreasing student performance in science. These results, which were among those picked up by the press from the international leak, caused a major stir and led to outrage with educational policy makers. The press in the **Czech Republic** focused on students' improvement in math and science. In **Japan**, the media centered specifically on students' decrease in reading literacy performance, stating that Japanese students' reading skills had "... plummeted over the past few years, leaving Japan lagging behind ...."[4] In the **United Kingdom**, despite statements issued by the DfES explaining that 2003 results were not comparable due to low response rates, newspapers still headlined that "UK Schools Slip Down the World's League Table."[5]

Newspapers in **Canada** and **New Zealand** set the trend story within the context of current performance. Canadian media reported that "despite Canada's drop in the overall rankings, the country remains well above the OECD's 500-point average for each subject area ...."[6] In the same way, New Zealand's press noted that while its students fell from the top performing group to the second-highest group, they were still performing above-average compared to other countries.

Other key topics from PISA

In addition to average performance and trends, the press in a number of countries also focused on differences in achievement among various student groups. The most common topic was gender differences. For instance, the media in both **Australia** and **Canada** highlighted the weaker performance of boys in reading. Additionally, **Iceland**'s press drew attention to the unique result of girls outperforming boys in math, which analyses in the country's national report further explained as a difference that tended to be significant only in rural areas. The media also expressed substantial interest in the effects of socio-economic status and immigration on student performance. The press in **Australia** and the **Slovak Republic** all highlighted the relationship between social background and student performance, while media in **Luxembourg** picked up on analyses

[3] Dobbs, M. (2004, December 7). In a Global Test of Math Skills, U.S. Students Behind the Curve. *The Washington Post*.

[4] Japanese kids lag world in reading skills. (2004, December 7). *Mainichi Daily News*. Retrieved from http://mdn.mainichi.co.jp

[5] Clare, J. (2004, December 7). UK schools slip down the world's league table. *The Daily Telegraph*, p. 1. [Online]. Available: http://www.lexisnexis.com/universe.

[6] Schmidt, S. (2004, December 7). Canada slips to 11th in global education study. *Ottawa Citizen*.

relating performance more specifically with the profession of parents. **Austria** and **Switzerland**'s media also stressed the effect of immigration on student achievement, highlighting the underachievement and disadvantage of immigrants and their difficulties with integration. Luxembourg's press discussed the high proportion of foreign students (40 percent) and its impact on overall performance.

Moreover, numerous countries centered in on achievement differences among various subgroups of national interest. Multiple **Australian** newspapers emphasized that, despite the country's overall high performance, indigenous students still performed well below the OECD average and the average of non-indigenous students. **Canada**'s media highlighted the difference in performance between English- and French-speaking students, while the **United States**' called attention to the differences in performance between white students and black and Hispanic students.

In addition, the press in some countries also emphasized the differences between high and low levels of student achievement within countries—or, how wide is the gap between strong and weak students? Both **Australian** and **Japanese** media expressed concerns about the proportion of students at the lowest percentiles of literacy, and **New Zealand**'s media also consistently noted that the difference in performance between high and low achievers in their country was above the OECD average.

While achievement differences were a common topic, the media also drew attention to variations in performance based on school structure and practices. The press in several countries, including **Austria**, the **Czech Republic** and **Switzerland**, focused on the structure of

Box 2: Overview of Some PISA 2003 Results Covered by Media

- International comparisons of student performance—the "horse race"
- Differences in relative performance from 2000 to 2003
- Achievement differences between:
  - Girls and boys
  - Students of different social backgrounds
  - Native-born and immigrant students
  - Groups of particular national interest (e.g., race/ethnicity, language group, urban/rural)
- Distribution of achievement
  - Percentages of students at lowest levels of literacy
  - Differences between high- and low-students within countries
  - Variation in performance between schools
- School environment
  - Amount of homework
  - Classroom environment (e.g., disorder)
  - Student evaluation in schools
- System-level issues
  - Comprehensive versus selective systems
  - Performance in relation to national income and education spending

the education system, discussing the advantages and disadvantages of comprehensive schools versus selective education systems and the appropriate age of selection. The media also looked at the effects of environment and homework on student performance. Newspapers in **Sweden** raised the issue of noise and disorder in classrooms, while **Japanese** papers reported that their students spend fewer than average number of hours each week on homework. Additionally, **Swiss** newspapers raised the topic of how students are typically evaluated in schools. Finally, the press in a few countries drew links at the system level. Articles in **Australia**, **Austria** and the **Netherlands** reported on the relationship between education expenditures and student achievement in PISA 2003.

The "Luxembourg Paradox"

The press in Luxembourg were most curious about what they called the "Luxembourg Paradox:" Why is student performance in the literacy areas average compared to other European countries even though all students are fluent in at least three languages?

Focus in TIMSS results

The media's reporting of PISA 2003 results varied in content, but the press largely focused their coverage of TIMSS 2003 on students' change in performance as compared to TIMSS 1995. One newspaper in **Australia** reported that their students' performance " ... remained static ... while those in other countries have made big gains."[7] **New Zealand**'s media drew attention to the significant improvement in fourth-grade math and science while also mentioning that performance at the eighth-grade level remained the same. Interestingly, the press related the positive results in the primary grades to policy interventions, while noting that those at the middle grades, implemented later, may not have had adequate time to exert an influence over the assessment results.

In **Sweden**, the media concentrated on the significant decrease in student performance in both math and science. The press' focus in the **United Kingdom** was mixed, drawing attention to both the significant improvement in the performance of primary school students as well as the static performance of 14-year-olds. Similarly, the press in the **United States** highlighted the mixed results, reporting that "U.S. eighth-grade students are improving in science and math compared with international peers, but the nation's fourth-graders have stagnant scores and are slipping behind in both subjects ...."[8]

Opinions, Praise and Criticism

Beyond simply reporting the results of PISA 2003 and TIMSS 2003, the media often carried more evaluative stories in the form of editorials, opinion-editorials, feature articles or quotes from experts and authorities. One **Australian** editorial praised the current education system while encouraging further decentralization

[7] Barnes, R. (2004, December 15). Aussies fail to share in brain gain. *Courier Mail*, p. 12. [Online]. Available: http://www.lexisnexis.com/universe.

[8] Feller, B. (2004, December 14). Compared with peers, U.S. students yield mixed results in science, math. *Associated Press*. [Online]. Available: http://www.lexisnexis.com/universe.

of that system in order to achieve even better results in the future. Another article took a more technical stance, cautioning that readers should keep in mind the technical specificities of PISA and await the TIMSS 2003 results to confirm PISA's evaluation of Australian education. A **Canadian** editorial, like many of the country's earlier news articles, concentrated on provincial comparisons, questioning why one province's performance fell behind that of others. A focal point of concern expressed by many news articles and editorials in the **United States** was that students' poor performance in math could hinder the country's future economic success.

In several countries, the media ran feature stories either offering explanations for the results or solutions for improvement. At least 12 articles in **Belgium (French community)**, for example, discussed possible remedies for improving education. An editorial in **Ireland**, specifically concerned about the average performance in math, proposed that the government revise lower secondary school math curriculum to further emphasize real-life applications. A number of articles in the **United States** also suggested solutions, including: decentralization of the education system, raising teachers' salaries and committing to more balanced and rigorous math curricula.

The media in several other countries took a more aggressive stance with government's educational policy. In **Austria**, the media severely criticized the Federal Minister for Education, Science and Culture and demanded her resignation. The press also blamed educational policymakers and called for extreme measures in reforming the education and training system. Likewise, in **Japan**, where the decreasing student performance was a prominent issue even before the release of PISA 2003, one article reported that school teachers and education experts felt that the government's "relaxed"[9] education policy was responsible. Other articles in Japanese newspapers identified possible reasons for the declining achievement levels, including: the shortened five-day school week and revised academic curriculum introduced in 2002; thinner textbooks as a result of the new curriculum; students' low motivation to study and the declining number of hours students spend on homework; and poor teacher quality. The **Swedish** press also centered on reasons for the decline in performance and issued demands for authorities to act. As in Austria and Japan, the media blamed the government, faulting the cutback of resources to schools in the 1990s for the decline of education.

[9] Survey exposes academic problems. (2004, December 8). *The Daily Yomiuri*, p. 2. [Online]. Available: http://www.lexisnexis.com/universe.

Network A

Network A last met in El Escorial, Spain, on October 14-15, 2004. The key topics discussed at this meeting were: the Task Force on Teaching and Learning's proposed teacher survey, *Education at a Glance* 2005, and the activities of the three working groups established at the previous meeting.

Concerning the work of the Task Force on Teaching and Learning, discussion centered primarily on the proposal for a teacher survey with a sub-study of teachers in PISA schools. All members affirmed the need for more information on teachers, teaching, and learning. A few were open to the possibility of a teacher survey linked with PISA, but the majority favored a separate survey—a reaction which was put forth to the PISA Governing Board (PGB) for their deliberation. As a conclusion, the Network drafted a statement to express strong support for an internationally comparative survey of teacher characteristics and teaching processes but also expressed methodological reservations about linking such a survey to PISA with the intent of exploring issues of effectiveness.

The Network also discussed draft indicators for *EAG* 2005. Indicators for *EAG* 2005 are drawn from both TIMSS and PISA, and topics include the following: achievement and trends in fourth- and eighth-grade mathematics and science; mathematics, reading and scientific literacy of 15-year-olds; problem-solving abilities of 15-year-olds; and between- and within-schools variation in mathematical literacy. Taking members' suggestions into consideration, the Network A Secretariat is currently revising the indicators.

The Network also discussed possible next steps for each of its three new working groups. The first working group, data, identified as its priority the development of a database that would collect information on national and international studies and would serve as a tool for helping countries make decisions. This group also is interested in how to facilitate cooperation and coordination across IEA and OECD studies. The second working group, development, is currently focused on national attempts to measure competencies and is exploring various assessment frameworks. This group also is interested in learning about different types of value-added studies and exploring the feasibility of assessing older students. The third working group, analysis, reporting and dissemination, reported on international assessment outcomes in a round-table discussion, which found that most countries had similar dissemination methods but that the impact of these results on national policy varied. They brainstormed activities such as consolidating what we have learned across international assessments so far and ways to connect countries around data analysis.

Finally, members also discussed a proposal for the technical review of PISA that would focus on reviewing methodological issues related to the establishment of stable trend lines. The Network will oversee an expert panel that will analyze the strengths and weaknesses of different methodological approaches and will provide inputs to PISA's Strategic Development Group and their discussion on long-term planning for PISA.

The next Network A meeting will be in Stockholm, Sweden, on March 2-4, 2005, followed by a PISA Governing Board meeting March 7-9.

Network B

Network B last met November 8-9, 2004, in Edinburgh, Scotland. The focus of the meeting was on development work in the following areas: continuing education and training (CET), transition from education to work, labor market outcomes and educational attainment, and economic and social outcomes. Members also discussed how to address equity issues within each of these other dimensions.

Data collection on CET will begin soon and indicators will be published in *Education at a Glance* 2005. While the European Union Life Long Learning Survey (ELFS LLL) 2003 module will be the main data source (for those countries participating in the survey), the Network also decided to launch a data collection for countries not represented in the ELFS LLL module. In addition, discussion and planning will continue this year for the publication and dissemination of a CET report, which will be aimed at helping countries develop internationally comparable CET data.

Within the area of transition from school-to-work, the report on the Early Labor Market Experience of Young Adults with a Low Level of Education (YALLE) is in its final stages and should be completed by May 2005. At the meeting, members also discussed developing a framework for monitoring transition systems, and a number of countries expressed interest in supporting and participating in this work.

In the area of labor market outcomes and educational attainment, the Network decided to continue work on a study of the supply of competences and plans to discuss analytical aspects, such as demand, migration, and job-matching, at the next meeting. Members also considered the possibility of a follow-up study to PISA 2000 based on students' choice of higher education or employment.

Regarding economic and social outcomes, members decided that while data collection should continue to focus primarily on earnings from work, it also would be extended to include a pilot data collection on distribution of earnings. The Network also approved a proposal for a joint project with the OECD Center for Educational Research and Innovation (CERI) on the social outcomes in education.

Additionally, members discussed the dimension of equity within the three main working areas of CET, transition, and social and economic outcomes. In relation to two of these topics, the Network concluded that equity is already a vital part of policy goals and indicators related to transition, and that the distribution of earnings study should take the aspect of equity into consideration. However, exploring equity issues in CET will depend on the availability of additional human resources.

At the meeting, the Network also established working groups in the following areas: CET, monitoring transition, supply of skills, the joint CERI and Network B social outcomes of education project, and review of Network B policy issues. These groups will undertake development work in between plenary meetings.

The next Network B meeting will take place on May 24-25, 2005, in Helsinki, Finland.

Network C

From June to December 2004, Network C's main activities have focused on reestablishing major areas of work for 2005-2006, including continued work on and possible expansion of the collection of system-level teacher indicators, and utilization of the PISA thematic reports (from 2000 and 2003) to present indicators on quality- and equity-relevant school and teaching factors. Another development area is further preparatory work to operationalize a data strategy on teachers, teaching and learning, which involves the following: linking instrument development to the state-of-the-art research literature on teacher and teaching effectiveness; the continued exploration of innovative data strategies in this area; and studying possible linkages to educational outcomes by relating data collection to PISA. Concerning the International Survey of Upper Secondary Schools (ISUSS), the Network agreed not to proceed with any further work. Network C last met in Sesimbra, Portugal, on November 10-12, 2004.

Box 3: Upcoming Meetings

- March 2-4, 2005
  Network A, *Stockholm*
- March 7-9, 2005
  PISA Governing Board, *Stockholm*
- April 20-22, 2005
  Network C, *Vienna*
- May 24-25, 2005
  Network B, *Helsinki*

Building on the standard teaching-related indicators, the Network is seeking to improve the analysis and explanation of the interaction among the system-level indicators (teaching time, instruction time, class size and student-to-staff ratios) in order to illustrate policy trade-offs that countries make. After the meeting, the working group on regular Network C indicators prepared a proposal for potential comparisons among system-level indicators, which was sent to OECD for consideration in *Education at a Glance* 2005. In addition, there will be an investigation of better benchmarks for teachers' salaries as well as a breakdown of the factors that influence teacher's salaries.

The Network also is seeking to improve the quality of its annual data collection through a review of the data provided. In December 2004 and January 2005, the working group on regular Network C indicators prepared a quick survey on data quality issues with regard to instruction time, teachers' teaching and working time, and teachers' salaries. This survey will be sent to all countries involved in the data collection, including both Network C countries and non-Network C countries (Australia, Iceland and Japan). Furthermore, the Network also will consider the possibility of collecting actual rather than statutory data (particularly in the area of teachers' working time and teachers' salaries) and methods for obtaining better data on monetary and non-monetary incentives for teachers. The results will be published in a report focusing on the quality and comparability of the data collected and recommendations for improvement. Draft conclusions should be ready by the April

2005 meeting, which would allow changes to be made for the Teachers and the Curriculum Survey's 2005 data collection.

At the most recent meeting, the Network also decided to explore new areas of system-level indicators on teachers, such as: the degree of importance of teaching assistants in primary and secondary education; aspects of the comprehensive versus categorical nature of secondary education; and national provisions for evaluation and accountability. Additionally, the results of the OECD Center for Educational Research and Innovation (CERI) study on attracting, developing and retaining effective teachers will be considered as a possible source of inspiration for establishing additional priority areas for new development. Paulo Santiago, from the teacher policy project, presented to members the main findings and policy directions from the project as well as the project's views on data gaps and priorities for future data development. As such, this also raises for consideration the content of the proposed international teacher survey.

Finally, members discussed at length a strategy for the development of indicators on teachers, teaching and learning. Jaap Scheerens reported to the Network on recent insights from research on school- and instructional-effectiveness. Tina Seidl, from the Leibniz Institute for Science Education (IPN) at the University of Kiel in Germany, gave a presentation on the use of classroom video studies for the study of teaching and learning. This IPN Physics Video Study, which took place in three phases over a four-year period, used multiple sources, such as video analyses of teaching, student questionnaires, teacher questionnaires, teacher interviews and student tests. Michael Davidson updated members on developments surrounding the proposed teacher survey since the last meeting. The Network welcomed the Joint Session of the Education Committee and the CERI Governing Board's decision to proceed with the development of a teacher survey that would fulfill the following criteria: encompass a representative sample of the teacher workforce; cover lower and upper secondary, and potentially, primary education; and include teachers of 15-year-olds in PISA schools as a sub- (or additional) sample to provide a link to PISA. The development of a full proposal is underway for 2005-2006. During the first half of 2005, Network C will provide a forum for consultation and advice on aspects of the survey development and, through the Secretariat, direct input to questionnaire development. At the same time, the Network will continue the work in the joint Task Force with Network A to develop a more long-term strategy for a well-controlled study on teaching effectiveness.

The next meeting of Network C will be in Vienna, Austria, on April 20-22, 2005.

PISA Governing Board

The PISA Governing Board (PGB) last met on October 18-20, 2004, in El Escorial, Spain. The main topics of discussion were: the PISA 2006 questionnaire and science assessment; data on teachers, teaching and learning; and the thematic reports from PISA 2003.

The meeting began with discussion on the PISA 2006 questionnaire framework and proposals for future policy research. The PGB emphasized the need to further develop the conceptual and theoretical basis of questionnaires and analysis plans

and the importance of maintaining consistency across successive cycles of principal and student surveys. Members also discussed analyses on parental involvement in education, stressing its policy relevance as well as commenting on the difficulties in obtaining data on student-parent interactions.

The PGB also discussed the PISA 2006 science assessment. This assessment includes materials from a wide range of countries and maintains a balance among a variety of content areas and between cognitive and attitudinal items. The assessment also encompasses two different elements, "knowledge of science" (an understanding of scientific concepts and theories) and "knowledge about science" (an awareness of the limits of studying science). The PGB extended the PISA Science Forum's contract until the end of 2006, allowing it to aid in the following capacities: validation of the science proficiency scales, reporting and dissemination of PISA 2006, and guidance in the development of context questionnaires. The Science Forum also will advise in the progress of the computer-based assessment, which is currently in field trial stage.

The meeting then turned to the topic of a data strategy on teachers, teaching and learning. Members discussed the proposals to develop a survey strategy and agreed on the relevancy of a sub-study within PISA that describes the instructional environment of 15-year-olds. However, the PGB also expressed concern that such a survey would only provide limited evidence on school effectiveness and could possibly be misconstrued to give teachers a negative impression of PISA. Members agreed that substantial developmental work would be necessary in order to create a feasible strategy, and thus a survey would not be ready to be administered with PISA 2006.

The final topic of discussion was reporting from PISA 2000 and 2003. The international reports from both PISA 2000 and 2003 cover basic information on student performance in the key literacy areas as well as analyzes relating performance to socio-economic background characteristics. The next thematic report from cycle one, on school factors related to quality and equity will be published some time in 2005. The first thematic reports from cycle two will focus on student performance and engagement in math and teaching and learning strategy. PGB members asked the OECD Secretariat to explore the feasibility of printing PISA repots in multiple languages.

The next PISA Governing Board meeting will take place in Stockholm, Sweden, on March 7-9, 2005.

Country Highlight: Education System and Assessment in Turkey

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The Ministry of National Education is responsible for all educational services in Turkey, in accordance with the provisions of the Basic Law of National Education. The two main advisory bodies are the National Council of Education and the Board of Education. There also are two subsidiary organizations affiliated with the Ministry, the General Directorate of Higher Education Loans and Dormitories and the National Education Academy.

At the provincial level, educational services are managed by the provincial directorates of national education. Various powers can be vested within these directorates, depending on the social and economic development of the province, its population, and the number of students it serves.

National development plans and government programs define educational targets that take into account the needs of individuals and of the industrial and service sectors. Technological developments and outcomes of national discourse on education also are considered while developing these targets.

The council of Higher Education (YÖK) is the planning, coordinating, and policy-making body for higher education in the country.

Structure of the System

According to Basic Education Law, educational activities in Turkey can be divided into two parts, formal and adult education. The formal education system covers preschool, primary, secondary and higher education institutions.

Preschool education

Preschool education, which is optional in Turkey, aims to support the development of children up to six years of age with respect to mental, emotional, social and psychomotor formation in a school environment. The preschool education program is designed for children with normal development skills and maintains a flexible curriculum to take children's needs into consideration. As a result, conditions in the educational environments within preschools may vary.

Primary education

As of 1997-1998, primary education, lasting eight years (between the ages of six and 14), is compulsory for all citizens of both sexes and is free of charge in state (public) schools. In accordance with national education's general aims and basic principles, the goals and duties of primary education institutions are to enable students to acquire the basic knowledge, skills and attitudes necessary to be a Turkish citizen and to prepare them for higher education and for life beyond school. Graduates of primary school are awarded a primary education diploma. In 1997-1998, the enrollment rate was 99.8 percent in primary schools, grades one to five, and 69.6 percent in junior high schools, grades six to eight.

Secondary education

Secondary education covers general high schools, as well as vocational and technical high schools, and provides at least three years of education. The duties of secondary education institutions are to introduce through general education the concept of personal and social conflicts or problems, to search for remedies for such conflicts and to enable the students to acquire the consciousness and power to participate in the economic and social development of the country. Such an education prepares students for higher education or vocational education and guides them in choosing either higher education or an occupational field consistent with their abilities and interests. In 1997-1998, the overall enrollment rate at the secondary level was 54.7 percent (30.8 percent overall in general high schools and 23.9 percent overall in vocational/technical high schools.)

Education Expenditures

Turkey's public spending on education significantly increased after 1998, both in real terms and as a percentage of gross domestic product (GDP). In terms of distribution of public expenditure on education across different levels, the year 2000 figures indicate about 49 percent of public education funds are allocated to primary schooling. The same source reveals that secondary schooling receives 20 percent of public education expenditure and 31 percent goes to tertiary education. Expenditure per primary, secondary and post-secondary non-tertiary student increased by 29 percent between 1995 and 2001. Expenditure on educational institutions as a percentage of GDP for all levels of public education was as follows: 2.8 percent in 1990; 2.3 percent in 1995; and 3.5 percent in 2001.

National Assessment Studies

National assessment studies started in Turkey in 1994. The Ministry of Education is responsible for the assessment of student performance in Turkey. The aims of the national assessment studies are to assess the educational achievement of students in a variety of subject areas at several age and grade levels and to identify trends in achievement levels over specified periods of time.

In 1997, 1998 and 1999, student achievement tests were conducted in science, Turkish language, mathematics and social sciences in grades five and eight. In total, a sample of 266,994 students took the test.

In 2002, two additional achievement test subjects (computer literacy and English language) were added in grades five and eight. The mathematics, science, social science and Turkish language tests also were expanded to include students in grades four and seven. A sample of about 112,000 students were tested. These assessment studies will continue in 2005.

Under the cover of the Basic Education Project, student-centered curriculum has been developed. In order to evaluate this curriculum, new student assessment systems (portfolio, peer-assessment, group assessment and performance assessment) will be piloted in 2005 in nine provinces, at 120 primary schools to 90,000 students. Next year, this assessment will be expanded throughout Turkey.

The results of these studies provide feedback to help the related units of the Ministry assess the outcomes of the educational programs and to help to improve the effectiveness of the education system.

International Assessments Studies

In addition to national assessments, Turkey participated in two IEA studies, TIMSS 1999 and PIRLS 2001, and OECD's PISA 2003. Turkey plans to participate in PISA 2006 and TIMSS 2007 as well.

These international comparative studies will enable the Ministry to better understand the achievement level of our students in the field of mathematics, science and reading literacy. Results will be valuable data for educational policy makers, curriculum developers, school administrators, teachers and parents.

Current Assessment Activities

Among the countries that responded to our request for information, several countries described activities for national assessments. Many OECD countries, in addition to participating in international assessment studies, conduct their own national assessments and/or testing and examination programs. This article describes the activities that occurred between June and December 2004 with respect to these programs. These activities range from planning and development to data collection to analysis and reporting.

National assessments

• **Australia** recently developed a program of three national sample assessments. The results of the first national sample assessment of primary science in year six are currently under analysis. Testing for this assessment took place in October 2003, and a report of the results should be ready within the next few months. In addition, the first national sample assessments of civics and citizenship in year six and year ten were administered in October 2004. Work also is progressing in the development of instruments for the first national sample assessments of ICT in year six and year ten, which are scheduled for October 2005.

• **Belgium (French community)** began its current assessment program in 1994. Assessments are given annually during the first trimester of the school year to students of one grade level and on one subject matter. The main purpose of the exams is to give teachers information about their students' level of knowledge in the subject area. Members from a research department in the school administration, along with school representatives and researchers, work together to publish the results of a representative sample of students as well as other publications describing methods for helping students overcome the difficulties in learning the subject. Between June and December 2004, a number of activities took place relating to the most recent assessment, eighth grade (secondary school) reading and math: final preparation of the assessments; administration of the assessments in schools; correction by teachers; analysis of a repre-

sentative sample of test booklets by researchers; and the writing of a report of the results and initial comments.

• In spring 2004, **Canada** administered the third assessment of science in the School Achievement Indicators Program (SAIP Science III). Scoring sessions and expectations-setting panels—since results are reported, among other methods, as percentages of students meeting expectations—were held in the summer and fall of 2004, and results will be released in spring 2005.

• In the last six months of December, **Ireland** scaled achievement data and conducted preliminary analyses in relation to national assessments of primary level reading literacy (fifth grade) and mathematics (fourth grade). The reports on these results will be published in fall 2005. In addition, the outcomes of a survey on reading standards in disadvantaged primary schools were released in November.

• **Mexico** has two agencies responsible for educational assessments, one of which is the National Institute for Educational Evaluation (INEE). In June 2004, the INEE collected data for reading and math assessments, testing samples of approximately 50,000 sixth and ninth grade students. Results were published in November, and a yearbook of educational indicators was released in December. Furthermore, the INEE also developed a new set of instruments for the Spanish and math assessments to replace old tests that had several technical problems. Development activities included: planning the test, after careful curriculum revision; training a large group of item developers; and constructing and validating about 1,600 items, with participation from teachers in all 31 federal states. The items will be piloted in February 2005.

• The **Slovak Republic** also reported progress on a number of national assessments. MONITOR 9 is a national assessment given to students at the end of compulsory education, when they are approximately 15 years old. In the past six months, activities included: test construction; development and revision; and piloting and data collection. In addition, a project on Nutrition and Health in Education collected data in order to review and improve the related curriculum, which required: constructing the tests and questionnaires, piloting the tests; scoring; analyzing; and finally revising. Preparations for reporting the results are currently underway.

• In **Sweden**, the annual national assessments were recently administered in ninth grade in Swedish/Swedish as a second language, English and mathematics. Test construction and development for these assessments are part of a continuous two-year process. The assessments are meant to be both summative and formative and fill the following purposes: acting as a diagnostic tool, exemplifying goals and performance standards, supporting fair and equal grading and serving accountability purposes. Teachers are currently scoring the tests, and the results will be reported to the National Agency for Education.

• The **Swiss** Conference of Cantonal Ministers of Education made plans to launch an assessment of competencies in several important subjects at the end of upper secondary education (pre-university level only), which would be the first of their kind in Switzerland.

• In the **United Kingdom**, the national test results for students ages seven, 11 and 14 were collected, analyzed and published.

National testing and examination programs

• In 2001, the **Czech Republic** established a program of faculty assessment in order

to support schools in preparing for a standardized final secondary school examination, which will be introduced in 2008. Also, between July and December 2004, the results of an examination administered in spring 2004 were evaluated and disseminated, and preparations began for the 2005 examination. In addition, tests were administered in all basic schools in one region as part of a pilot project of standardized exams in the last grade of basic school. Results were recently evaluated and disseminated, and preparations are underway for a second exam that will be given in spring 2005 to basic schools in three regions.

• **Iceland** schools had an unusual fall semester, as all teachers in primary and lower secondary schools (compulsory schools) were on strike for seven weeks. The strike postponed the national tests in Icelandic and math in fourth and seventh grade, which were scheduled for October 2004. Instead, these tests will now be held in February 2005. In addition, preparation is ongoing for tenth grade exams and upper secondary final exams. Tenth grade exams will be held in May 2005 in six subjects: Icelandic, math, English, Danish, social studies and science. Final exams are administered by the Educational Testing Institute and are required in order to obtain a final diploma. One final exam, the national test in Icelandic, was given in December, and others will be administered in spring 2005 and in three subjects: Icelandic, mathematics and English.

• Every year, **Korea** administers a national education achievement and college scholastic aptitude test for entrance to college.

• The **Slovak Republic** administers a final graduation exam, *Maturita*, at the end of high school/secondary education, when students are about 18 or 19 years old. Activities for *Maturita* in the last few months included: analyzing and reporting results, revising, consensus building, test development and preparation in three subjects for the main test in 2005.

International assessments

• **Canada** has been actively involved in the review of science items for PISA 2006 and has been preparing for the administration of the field trial by drawing the samples and by training school test administrators. Canada also is currently considering participation in a number of 2006 or 2007 international assessments administered by the International Association for the Evaluation of Educational Achievement (IEA), including: TIMSS, the Second Information on Technology in Education Study (SITES) and the Progress in International Reading Literacy Study (PIRLS). Provinces may participate independently, as several have indicated an interest in participating in TIMSS at one or more grade levels. Ontario and Quebec are already preparing for the field testing of PIRLS in the spring of 2005.

• Preparations are underway in **Iceland**, **New Zealand** and **Spain** for both the PISA 2006 and the PIRLS 2006 field trials, which will be conducted in spring 2005. Iceland is preparing for the PISA 2006 Computer-based Assessment of Science (CBAS) as well.

This newsletter is published under the auspices of Network A. Network A, which is primarily concerned with indicators of learner outcomes, is one of several working groups that are part of OECD's International Indicators of Education Systems (INES) Project. The newsletter is prepared by Eugene Owen (Network A Chair) and Maria Stephens and Euhwa Tran of the American Institutes for Research with contributions from Network A members. The newsletter was designed by Charmaine Llagas.

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